

Homeless Shelter Workers in Midwestern Urban Centers

Archie Green Fellows Project AFC2016034

Oral History of Alison Smith, Director of Atti's Eats Pet food and Supplies Pantry;

Bismarck, North Dakota on April 4, 2017

Summary of Interview

Alison Smith started Atti's Eats Pet food and Supplies Pantry, operating in Mandan, Bismarck, and at times statewide in North Dakota. The organization provides pet food, pet supplies, and assistance with the animals of people living in poverty and homelessness. Atti's Eats operates largely out of a trailer that Alison brings to locations where the pet supplies are distributed; it therefore does not have a permanent address where it provides services.

This interview took place in a room at the Bismarck Veterans Memorial Library at 515 North 5th Street, Bismarck, North Dakota, 58501.

Note: Photos accompanying this oral history were taken on Alison's farm, with Alison, her husband, and their pets.

Interview Log

- 00:00:01 Introduction;
- 00:00:27 Atti's East is a program of the Triple H Miniature Horse Rescue; also a cat rescue; full name is Atti's Eats Pet food and Supplies Pantry; Atti (Atticus) was a starving dog found on a reservation who she rescued; started soliciting donations of pet food & supplies; program is two years old;
- 00:02:43 Serves :
- Homeless people;
 - people on the verge of homelessness;
 - people divorcing;
 - people with major illnesses;
 - who have had a fire in their home;
 - anyone low-income or who can't get out to pick up food;
- 00:03:31 Goal is to fulfill a temporary, emergency need; effort to educate people about pet costs before they adopt; require people not be actively breeding an animal; story of a woman who was feeding her dog her own food; food stamps cannot be used for pet food; no other program will pay for pet food;
- 00:06:30 Relies on donations; prior Sunday 52 people came to her food distribution; story of a woman with 5 mastiffs and 5 cats; limits help to three animals per person; shame of being seen be others in a small town; people sign up, story of a woman who requested a collar for a pit bull and feeling judged;

- 00:09:29 Discussion of her work as a preventative measure to help people maintain their housing; animal shelters in town are all full; story of a woman who lost her home and lived with her dog in her car;
- 00:14:22 Vet services for low-income people may be offered; low-cost spay and neuter;
- 00:16:25 Story of a woman who was divorcing and had 11 full-size horses she needed someone to take; people abandon their horses; story of a horse abandoned in nearby town; story of abandoned horses in Theodore Roosevelt National Park;
- 00:18:44 Discussion about a homeless shelter where people could have their pets and liabilities and pet illnesses, fleas, dog bites, dog fights; story about Alison's adopted disabled animals, blind pit bull; her paralyzed dog and blind cat in a baby stroller at the pet store;
- 00:23:22 Alison also donates food to a local food pantry; she used to own property with a large pantry area but now uses an outfitted a trailer that can be pulled into town;
- 00:25:22 Story of a vet at a homeless shelter who got food for his kitten; discussion of delivering directly to people's homes; story of a 70-year-old volunteer who drives foods 120 miles to people;
- 00:28:05 Story about Alison giving a coffee can of dog food to homeless people outside with a dog; Trinity Church serves a "banquet" meal Thursdays where she distributes; efforts to not judge people;
- 00:31:12 Discussion of options for people losing their homes to find a place for her pets; story about Central Dakota Humane Society asking Alison to take a cat when an elderly couple moved to a nursing home; requirements for taking cats;
- 00:34:05 Discussion of area rescues judging people's reasons for relinquishing pets; she doesn't ask; if people are afraid to ask for help, they may dump the animal; story of taking in a disfigured cat and kittens abandoned in the road; importance of educating people about pet cost;
- 00:39:02 Everything is volunteer; she's retired; owns family farm to take in rescues; story of trapping a lady's feral cat colony in town and adopting them to farms as barn cats; story of cat in her garage with ten kittens; story of cats in her bathroom;
- 00:44:16 People find her mostly through word of mouth; discussion of demand; older people on social security; connected with Meals on Wheels; social media doesn't reach everyone; sent a letter to every North Dakota social service; connected with sheriff; reached out to homeless shelters; Homeless Coalition tabling event;
- 00:49:42 End